

NOVA Board: Digital Literacy Skills Essential for Access & Advancement in 21st Century Global Economy

In the next ten years, almost 80 percent of U. S. jobs will require workers to know how to use a computer, search the Internet and communicate using social networks. But today, over 20 percent of Americans lack these basic digital literacy skills. This skills gap hurts the ability of job seekers to access a wide array of employment opportunities and deprives employers of the talent they need to remain globally competitive.

NOVA, the Sunnyvale-based workforce board, has launched a comprehensive campaign to ensure that all workers have the digital literacy skills to compete in the fast-evolving labor market. The board kicked off its initiative on September 26 when it adopted a resolution promoting digital literacy. The action places NOVA in step with a national initiative of workforce training and job development agencies addressing the skills gap plaguing employers in industries ranging from hospitality to logistics to agriculture.

“This is a win-win initiative for workers and employers,” said Stephen Levy, director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy and member of the NOVA Workforce Board.

“Digital literacy is necessary for workers to advance in most occupations today,” he said. “And the economic competitiveness of firms here in Silicon Valley and across the state and nation depends on preparing everyone to live in a world that demands and rewards digital literacy.”

Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, NOVA is leveraging its relationships with tech stakeholders to better connect digitally literate job seekers with employers looking for talent. Last year NOVA produced *Silicon Valley in Transition*, a comprehensive study of regional tech workforce challenges and opportunities. That report laid the foundation for NOVA’s campaign to promote Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) digital literacy skills.

(These skills enable workers to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create and communicate information in a digital environment. ICT encompasses computer, software, networking telecommunications, Internet, programming and information systems technologies.)

In the resolution approved at its bi-monthly meeting, NOVA’s board answered the call of the Connect2Compete public-private coalition and 2,800 publicly funded career centers to greatly expand worker access to digital literacy training. NOVA’s resolution promotes:

- access by workers to jobs requiring ICT skills;
- opportunities for students and workers to acquire ICT skills; and
- development of programs that incorporate ICT training.

In addition, the NOVA board called on the State of California to adopt a digital literacy policy to help the state maintain its global leadership in ICT innovation and workforce competitiveness.

Jobs requiring ICT skills represent a growing share of California's labor market and they enjoy a higher median income than all jobs taken as a whole. The state currently has about 1.2 million ICT workers — five percent of the state total — employed in all industries. Between 2011 and 2013, state employers are projected to add 110,000 new and replacement jobs. The median ICT hourly wage of \$33.64 is 60 percent higher than the median wage for all jobs, according to the Mid-Pacific ICT Center (MPICT).

Statewide, over one-half of all employers report difficulty in recruiting employees with appropriate ICT skills and training, MPICT says. Locally, a majority of employers surveyed in *Silicon Valley in Transition* cited at least some difficulty finding qualified job candidates in ICT-related jobs.

NOVA's digital literacy campaign is part of a broader effort, called TechLadder, to help ICT workers of all skill levels continually advance their careers. This initiative will create a more demographically inclusive ICT workforce and will increase the overall talent pool available for Silicon Valley companies needing ICT skills. TechLadder partners include BW Research Partnership, a workforce and economic development consulting firm from Carlsbad, and The Stride Center, an Oakland-based agency that trains low-income workers for ICT careers.

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The NOVA Board ICT resolution is available at:

<http://novaworks.org/SpecialProjects/TechLadder.aspx>

NOVA's Silicon Valley in Transition study is available at:

<http://novaworks.org/LaborMarketInfo/Reports/InformationTechnologyStudy.aspx>